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# A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being

GUY FLETCHER

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So-called 'objective-list' theories of well-being (prudential value, welfare) are under-represented in discussions of well-being. I do four things in this article to redress this. First, I develop a new taxonomy of theories of well-being, one that divides theories in a more subtle and illuminating way. Second, I use this taxonomy to undermine some misconceptions that have made people reluctant to hold objective-list theories. Third, I provide a new objective-list theory and show that it captures a powerful motivation for the main competitor theory of well-being (the desire-fulfilment theory). Fourth, I try to defuse the worry that objective-list theories are problematically arbitrary and show how the theory can and should be developed.

## I. ENUMERATIVE AND EXPLANATORY THEORIES

At least since Parfit's discussion,<sup>1</sup> theories of well-being have been divided thus: hedonism, desire-fulfilment theory, objective-list theory. Even allowing that taxonomies are interest-relative, we might wonder whether this is the best taxonomy of theories of well-being. One reason for thinking otherwise is that it does not take account of a distinction, highlighted by Crisp, between *enumerative* and *explanatory* theories of well-being. I will use this distinction as follows.<sup>2</sup> Enumerative theories of well-being specify *which* things enhance well-being. Explanatory theories aim to explain *why* something enhances well-being.

Whilst hedonism and objective-list theories are enumerative – they specify an informative list of contributors to well-being – the desire-fulfilment theory is an *explanatory* theory. The desire-fulfilment theory tells us the conditions under which something is good for someone – namely when it fulfils one of the person's desires. Thus, unlike hedonism and objective-list theory, desire-fulfilment theory does not provide an enumerative account of *which* things are good for us.

<sup>1</sup> D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984), p. 493. For recent dissent see D. Dorsey, 'The Hedonist's Dilemma', *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8 (2011), pp. 173–96; C. Woodward, 'Classifying Theories of Welfare', *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> R. Crisp, *Reasons and the Good* (Oxford, 2006), p. 102. I borrow the spirit of Crisp's distinction but differ from him over some small details.

This is understandable because providing such an account would be difficult and unnecessary. It would be difficult because the enumerative account would be a list of everything that we desire (or desire under certain circumstances). It would be unnecessary because, even though the desire-fulfilment theory is explanatory, it tells us how to find out what is good for someone; we just need to find out what they desire.

Those who hold the desire-fulfilment theory should not be perturbed by the claim that their theory is an explanatory one. This is *no* objection to it and I expect desire-fulfilment theorists to be happy with their view being classified this way. Evidence for their likely agreement comes from their presentations of the view. A standard characterization is thus:

Something is good for a person, according to subjective accounts of well being, *because* she has a desire of the right sort for it.<sup>3</sup> (my italics)

This is clearly an expression of an *explanatory* theory. And I take this to be representative of how desire-fulfilment theorists regard their view.

It is worth pausing briefly to tackle the likely suggestion that we could collapse this distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories. Someone might try to do this by arguing (for example) that desire-fulfilment theories make an enumerative claim, namely that the things that are good for someone are *all and only the things that fulfil their desires*.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this is a possible way of presenting a view. But we should resist this attempt to collapse the distinction for a number of reasons. An enumerative version of the desire-fulfilment theory (namely the claim that all and only the things that a person desires are good for her) gets us no nearer to truth about which things are good for someone than the desire-fulfilment explanatory theory does on its own. If we know that the things that are good for someone (whatever they may be) are so because they fulfil her desires, we learn nothing new from the so-called enumerative theory that all and only the things that fulfil

<sup>3</sup> D. Sobel, 'Subjectivism and Idealization', *Ethics* 119 (2009), pp. 336–52, at 337.

<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, someone might accept that *one* formulation of the view is explanatory but claim that a related view, one which claims that the things that are good for you are complexes of <desires-plus-their-object>, is enumerative. Of course that is a possible view. But *that* theory – call it the 'complex desire theory' – is not the theory that goes by the name 'desire-fulfilment theory' in the literature and is discussed by R. B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (New York, 1979), p. 329; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 494; H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th edn. (Indianapolis, 1981), pp. 111–13, amongst others. On this see also Dorsey 'Hedonist's Dilemma', p. 176.

her desires are good for her. This purported enumerative theory is a spare wheel.

The only way to make this enumerative version of the theory informative would be to add a claim about which things we desire. For example, if the person claimed that we only desire (e.g.) *knowledge*, we can use this to home in on the truths about what would enhance someone's well-being – because we know that all and only the things that he desires are good for him and that he only desires knowledge. But all of the work in making the enumerative element informative is being done by the separate claim that we only desire knowledge.

A second reason not to collapse the distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories is that the distinction is one with which we are perfectly comfortable, and can see the value of, elsewhere. The same distinction distinguishes the Ten Commandments (an enumerative list of the actions that are wrong) from the divine-command theory (an explanatory theory of what *makes* something wrong). I take it that no-one thinks it improves our thinking about these issues to group these theories together by treating the divine command theory as a theory of *which things are wrong*.

A third reason why we should not collapse the distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories is that one might hold an enumerative theory whilst holding that there is *no* true explanatory theory. An example of this would be a hedonist who held that all and only pleasure is well-being enhancing but who thought that this was a fundamental fact about well-being, one not (non-trivially) explained by any further fact such as pleasure's fulfilling the human function, or desires, or anything else.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, there is also a pay-off to treating desire-fulfilment theories as purely explanatory, namely that doing so creates a parallel with desire theories of *reasons*. These are not enumerative accounts that specify the reasons that people have but, rather, theories of what explains *why someone has* a reason to  $\varphi$  (or of what must be the case for someone to have a reason to  $\varphi$ ). Such theories claim that in a case where A has a reason to  $\varphi$ , A has a reason to  $\varphi$  *because*  $\varphi$ -ing fulfils one of A's desires.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This is not to deny that such an enumerative theory can play *other* explanatory roles. One such role is the following: someone's having a lot of pleasure explains their having a high level of well-being. But this is different from the task of explaining why something is good for someone.

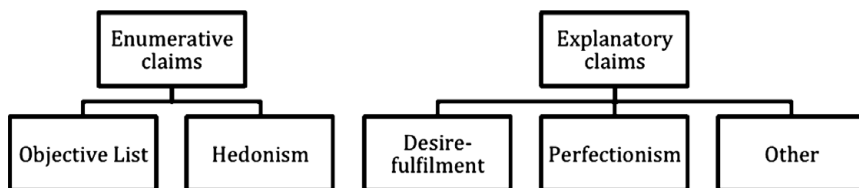
<sup>6</sup> For example, Mark Schroeder writes: 'Different *versions* of the Humean Theory of Reasons are distinguished by their distinctive theories about how Ronnie's reason is explained by his psychology' (M. Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (Oxford, 2007), p. 2).

Noticing that the desire theory of *reasons* has been construed as a purely explanatory theory should undermine any residual sense that classifying the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being as explanatory is any weakening of the view. And if we construe desire-fulfilment theories of well-being as explanatory theories we create a helpful isomorphism between desire theories of reasons and of well-being.<sup>7</sup>

One final clarification: whilst I mostly talk in terms of a contrast between enumerative theories and explanatory theories, there are of course theories of well-being that have both enumerative and explanatory elements. For example, Aristotle's theory of well-being contains an enumerative element that lists the constituents of human well-being and an explanatory element – namely the claim that there is a necessary connection between human well-being and the human function.<sup>8</sup> Nothing I say here should be taken to suggest that theories of well-being are exclusively explanatory or enumerative. Rather, some theories of well-being are best thought of as making enumerative claims, some are best thought of as making explanatory claims, whilst others make both kinds of claim.

## II. HEDONISM, OBJECTIVE-LIST THEORIES AND ATTITUDE-DEPENDENCE

So far I have argued that desire-fulfilment theory is an explanatory theory of well-being and that hedonism and objective-list theories of well-being are enumerative. This moves us from the standard taxonomy to the following:



Seeing that the objective-list theory is an enumerative theory helps to undermine some of the reasons why objective-list theories are rejected, reasons that stem from thinking that there is a deep difference between hedonism and objective-list theories *as a class*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of the structural similarity see, for example, D. O. Brink, 'The Significance of Desire', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 2008), pp. 5–46.

<sup>8</sup> There is of course debate about whether the enumerative part is monistic (the 'dominant end' conception) or pluralistic (the 'inclusive end' conception).

<sup>9</sup> One particularly mistaken objection that the distinction undermines is the idea that objective-list theories are committed to some explanatory theory like *human nature perfectionism*.

Having made this first change to the well-being taxonomy by introducing the enumerative/explanatory distinction, we should now ask whether it is correct to follow the old taxonomy in distinguishing between hedonism and objective-list theories. The distinction between hedonism and objective-list theories cannot plausibly be a distinction between monistic and pluralistic theories, for example, as then monistic theories would end up being classed as forms of hedonism independently of their content. Nor is the distinction between hedonism and objective-list theories a distinction between theories that meet the *experience requirement* and theories that do not.<sup>10</sup> Whilst *some* objective-list theories do not meet the experience requirement, others do. So we cannot differentiate hedonism and objective-list theories on this ground.

In fact we should not distinguish between hedonism and objective-list theories in our taxonomy of theories of well-being. Hedonism just is an example of a monistic enumerative theory and the label 'objective-list theories' just picks out all of the other enumerative theories. A similar claim – that hedonism just is an objective-list theory with a short list – has been made before, but some may still be sceptical. For this reason, I will take the time to show that there is no deep distinction between hedonism and objective-list theories.

Someone who thought that we should distinguish between hedonism and objective-list theories will probably claim that there is a significant difference between the two along the following lines: objective-list theories, unlike hedonistic theories, are attitude-independent, elitist or autonomy-violating. Though this is *prima facie* plausible, it is mistaken. These considerations cannot distinguish between hedonism and objective-list theories, for they apply to both or neither. The first task is to understand exactly what the objection is.

One might think that the objection to objective-list theories is that they are elitist or autonomy-violating. But this is a mistake. An objective-list theory is simply a list of which things contribute to well-being. What we should do with respect to those who do not care about or desire some element from the objective-list is a separate issue, one on which all theories of well-being are agnostic.<sup>11</sup>

The best way to understand the attitude-independence thought is as claiming that objective-list theories are distinct from hedonism because objective-list theories hold that whether something is good or bad for someone is independent of the attitudes that the person takes towards

<sup>10</sup> On the experience requirement see for example J. Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance* (Oxford, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> It obviously does not follow from the fact that it would be good for you to get F that others would be permitted to foist F upon you regardless of your attitudes.

the thing. We can formulate this as the claim that hedonism and objective-list theories differ with respect to:

(AD1) *Attitude-Dependence* 1: X cannot be good for someone unless they have pro-attitudes towards X.

Someone might claim that whilst objective-list theories are inconsistent with AD1, hedonism is consistent with it.

However, hedonism violates AD1 also. Thus AD1 cannot be used as a way of distinguishing hedonism from objective-list theories. To see why, suppose that we take an objective-list theory that claims that *knowledge* is the only thing that contributes to well-being. Clearly on this theory whether something is good or bad for someone is independent of the attitudes that the person takes towards the thing. The same is true of hedonism, however. Take an ascetic who seeks to avoid feeling pleasure for fear of corrupting his soul or angering his deity. Hedonism claims that all and only pleasure is good for someone and is thus committed to claiming that if this person were to experience pleasure then this pleasure is good for them, despite the fact that the person actively does not want this thing.<sup>12</sup> Both hedonism and objective-list theories violate AD1. They both hold that whether something is good or bad for someone is independent of the attitudes that the person takes towards the thing.

Someone might respond: 'hedonism combined with the desire theory of pleasure makes well-being attitude-dependent in a way that objective-list theories do not. Thus there is a real distinction between hedonism and objective-list theories.' But this is too quick. Even if combined with a desire theory of pleasure, hedonism still violates AD1.

The desire theory of pleasure is a claim about the *nature* of pleasure and it can take one of two forms. The first version is the claim that a sensation S is a pleasure when S is desired.<sup>13</sup> The second version is the claim that a pleasure is a compound state constituted by some sensation S and a desire for S. On both views it is true that whether some agent is experiencing pleasure is partly determined by their desires. This means that *pleasure* is attitude-dependent on these theories. But this does not make hedonism attitude-dependent in a sense that divides it

<sup>12</sup> One might worry that subsequent guilt will outweigh the effect of the pleasure. If so, remember that the relevant claim is a *pro tanto* one.

<sup>13</sup> This leaves out some details of the theory such as the nature of the desire and its timing. Though necessary for examining the plausibility of the view, they are irrelevant here. For discussion see: Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, pp. 103–11; C. Heathwood, 'The Reduction of Sensory Pleasure to Desire', *Philosophical Studies* 133 (2007), pp. 23–44; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 493; D. Sobel, 'Pain for Objectivists: The Case of Matters of Mere Taste', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 (2005), pp. 437–57.



from objective-list theories. On the hedonistic theory, pleasure is good for you even if you have no pro-attitude towards it.

To see why, consider the second version of the desire theory of pleasure, the one that claims that pleasure is constituted by some sensation and a desire for that sensation:  $\langle \text{sensation } S + \text{desire for sensation } S \rangle$ . The hedonist theory of well-being claims that this composite item, which is a pleasure, is good for someone whether or not she has a pro-attitude towards it. If the ascetic from the earlier example is experiencing pleasure, he is in this type of composite state, according to the desire theory of pleasure, and this state is good for him, according to hedonism, despite the fact that he has a second-order desire not to be in any such state.

For this reason, hedonism is no different from objective-list theories with respect to AD1. Both specify that certain things are good for people, independently of their attitudes towards those things. And this remains the case even if the hedonist also holds an attitudinal theory of pleasure.

Someone might respond that there is a different way in which the hedonistic theory – unlike the objective-list theory – *is* attitude-dependent, namely that certain counterfactuals where people lack pro-attitudes come out as true on the view. For example, take a person – A – who is experiencing pleasure playing football. A has a combination  $\langle S + \text{pro-attitude towards } S \rangle$  and so is experiencing pleasure; on the hedonist theory of well-being, this is good for him. Someone might, rightly, point out that in the situation where A does not have this pro-attitude there would be nothing enhancing his well-being there and she might conclude from this that hedonism, unlike objective-list theories, does not make well-being attitude-independent.

This suggests a different form of attitude-dependence:

(AD2) *Attitude Dependence 2*: Whether someone has some good – X – is dependent upon his pro-attitudes

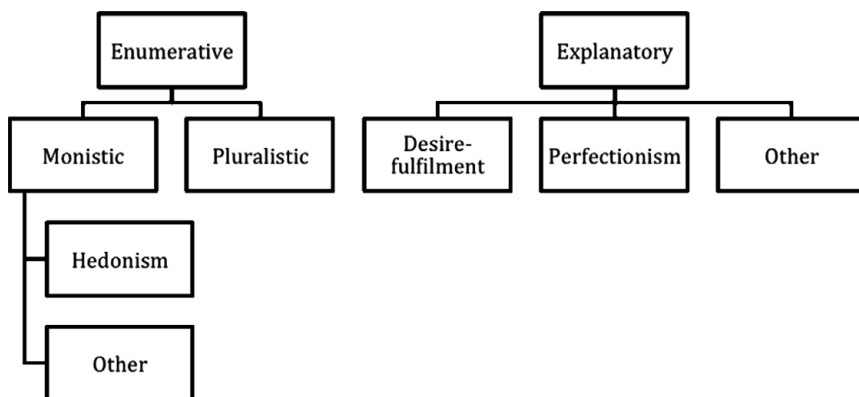
Someone might argue that we can distinguish hedonism from objective-list theories on the grounds that hedonism is consistent with AD2 whilst objective-list theories are inconsistent with it.

Again this is too quick. We cannot distinguish hedonism from objective-list theories using AD2 because objective-list theories can also be consistent with AD2. Take an objective-list theory with friendship on the list. Given that friendship is at least partly constituted by positive attitudes, the same kinds of counterfactuals come out as true on this theory as for hedonism. If someone has a friendship then that is something that is good for her, and in the counterfactual situation where the person lacks the pro-attitudes that constitute friendship this good is absent. This form of objective-list theory, by respecting AD2, is attitude-dependent in the same way that hedonism can be. Thus the

kind of attitude-dependence suggested by AD2 does not distinguish hedonism from objective-list theories.

For these reasons we should not think that there is a significant distinction between hedonistic theories and objective-list theories of well-being. And in order to draw the most interesting distinction, namely between these theories and desire-fulfilment theories, we should simply classify both as enumerative.

It might help to take a step back from the details and look again at the bigger picture. My suggestion is that hedonism and objective-list theories should not be distinguished fundamentally in the taxonomy of theories of well-being. I imagined someone claiming that there is a deep distinction between the theories, namely that objective-list theories do, and hedonism does not, hold that whether something is good for you is independent of your attitudes in some sense. I then showed that this is not true (even if hedonism were combined with the desire-theory of pleasure). Hedonism and objective-list theories are both attitude-independent, by violating AD1, and both can be attitude-dependent, by respecting AD2.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in order to draw the most illuminating and important distinction – that between these theories and explanatory theories like the desire-fulfilment theory – we should classify both as enumerative in the following manner.<sup>15</sup>



In trying to find the truth about well-being we should have a choice between two routes. The first route is that of establishing that some

<sup>14</sup> There will be many different ways in which a theory can make well-being attitude (in)dependent. Exploring these different dimensions of attitude (in)dependence of well-being is a very important task but one that would take me too far afield here. I thank Chris Heathwood and Alex Sarch for discussion of this.

<sup>15</sup> Henceforth I will stop distinguishing hedonism and objective-list theories and simply refer to enumerative theories (except where it is necessary to isolate hedonism in particular).

explanatory theory is correct. If we could establish that (e.g.) the desire-fulfilment theory is true, that would tell us an important truth about well-being and one that would enable us to do without an enumerative theory (though if there was one that would be an interesting bonus). Another approach is to develop enumerative theories.<sup>16</sup> My aim in the rest of the article is to make some progress down the second route. I do this by proposing a new, pluralist, enumerative theory and by showing that a major motivation for the competitor theory – the desire-fulfilment theory – is captured by my theory without incurring the costs associated with the desire-fulfilment theory.

### III. A NEW ENUMERATIVE THEORY

The enumerative theory that I propose claims that well-being is enhanced by:

Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect, Virtue

This leaves many issues open. For example, it includes no claims about the *relative importance* of each of the items. This is important because an under-appreciated fact about enumerative theories (perhaps because there are few of them on the market) is that even if we agree on such a list in outline, important questions remain. One could hold that all of these goods contribute equally to well-being and that some degree of any one of them is sufficient for a good life.<sup>17</sup>

Alternatively, one might think that these goods contribute unequally to well-being such that some of them are necessary for the life to reach the threshold of being a good life for the one that lives it, irrespective of how much one has of the other goods. Dealing with these issues is a job for another paper, so nothing that I say here is supposed to take a stand on these kinds of issues. Another issue that I leave aside here is whether we should think of the list as a list of conditional or unconditional contributors to well-being.<sup>18</sup>

Note that the theory includes only the basic elements of the *positive* side of well-being, so this is really only half of an objective-list theory of well-being.<sup>19</sup> Though the negative is important, because of constraints

<sup>16</sup> One could look for both an enumerative theory and an explanatory theory that underpins it.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of analogous issues for ‘multi-component’ theories see A. Sarch, ‘Multi-Component Theories of Well-Being and their Structure’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> For discussion see G. Fletcher, ‘Rejecting Well-Being Invariabilism’, *Philosophical Papers* 38 (2009), pp. 21–34.

<sup>19</sup> S. Kagan, ‘Well-Being as Enjoying the Good’, *Philosophical Perspectives: Ethics* 23 (2009), pp. 253–72, at 271, raises this issue for his positive enumerative theory. I discuss the negative side of well-being in G. Fletcher, ‘The Worst Things in Life’ (manuscript).

of space and because the literature has tended to focus on the positive determinants of well-being, I focus on those here.

Looking at the list, someone might complain that these items are all subjects of detailed philosophical investigation into their nature and that, for this reason, the theory does not tell us enough. Though the first part of this claim is true this does not jeopardize the theory for two reasons. First, though we are unsure of the correct account of the nature of many of these things, it is not the case that the list contains items *the existence of which* is a subject of philosophical debate and division. So whilst it is true that this theory awaits the results of philosophical inquiry into the nature of these things, it is not a hostage to fortune, or otherwise deficient, for that reason. Second, the same is true of other theories of well-being. The hedonistic enumerative theory awaits the correct theory of pleasure; the desire-fulfilment theory awaits the correct theory of desire; human nature perfectionism awaits the correct theory of human nature.

#### IV. AVOIDING ALIENATION

At the end of section II, I claimed that a major consideration that motivates the main alternative theory (the desire-fulfilment theory) is better accounted for by my enumerative theory. I move on now to showing that this is the case.

I take it that at least a large part of what attracts people to the desire-fulfilment theory is the idea that these theories have the requisite sensitivity to a person's attitudes (and that enumerative theories do not).<sup>20</sup> There will of course be other things that explain why people have been attracted to desire-fulfilment views – such views are often favoured by those attracted to metaphysical naturalism for example. But given that one can be a naturalist and a hedonist, or objective-list theorist, I think that this alienation or resonance point is the *best* such rationale for the desire-fulfilment theory.<sup>21</sup> An influential way of putting the rationale comes from Railton:

It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any way to engage him.<sup>22</sup>

Railton's claim helpfully brings out what is wrong with certain enumerative theories. If one held that the *only* positive contributors to well-being were things such as living in particular kinds of community,

<sup>20</sup> For critical discussion of the 'resonance constraint' see A. Sarch, 'Internalism about a Person's Good: Don't Believe It', *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> For discussion of this see B. Hooker, 'Theories of Welfare, Theories of Good Reasons for Action, and Ontological Naturalism', *Philosophical Papers* 20 (1991), pp. 25–36.

<sup>22</sup> P. Railton, 'Facts and Values', in *Facts, Values and Norms* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 47.

serving certain social roles or performing particular kinds of work, then one would be forced to hold that people whose lives contained these things were high in well-being irrespective of how much the person was indifferent to, or even loathed, them.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, such an enumerative theory is intolerably alienating and implausible.

Looking again at the enumerative theory that I have suggested – comprised of Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect, Virtue – we should note that *all* of these goods have pro-attitudes as *necessary* components.<sup>24</sup> This enables this view to respect Railton's point and to avoid being an alienating conception of a person's good. For everything on the list involves the person's engagement through her holding various kinds of pro-attitudes such as endorsement, desires and affection. If one is experiencing these kinds of states of engagement, one is doing well (and vice versa).

Desire-fulfilment theory correctly latches onto the fact that how well one's life goes is correlated (albeit imperfectly) with the extent that one experiences pro-attitudes. The mistake that the desire-fulfilment theory makes is that of allowing one's desires and attitudes to play an *unrestricted* explanatory role, one that goes beyond their being elements of well-being enhancers. The theory does this by treating our desiring something as being *sufficient* to *make* something good for us. This is because the desire-fulfilment theory offers more than a biconditional that asserts a necessary connection between what contributes to well-being and our desires. The theory claims that things are good for us *because* we desire them. As Sobel puts it:

Subjectivist accounts of well-being do not merely claim that an agent's desires covary with what is good for her or that having a desire for something is a necessary and sufficient condition of its being good for her. Subjectivists claim that the relevant sort of desire grounds, not merely tracks, the truth of claims about what is good for a person.<sup>25</sup>

It is *this* feature of the desire-fulfilment view that gives rise to the 'scope problem' for these theories – namely that too many things come out as good for us.<sup>26</sup> My theory avoids the scope problem

<sup>23</sup> Socrates *seemingly* endorses such a view of well-being for the producers in *The Republic*.

<sup>24</sup> Whilst this is clear in the case of all of the other goods it is worth briefly explaining why this is the case for achievement. It is plausible to claim that achievement has an attitudinal component because in achieving something one succeeds in one's aim and so one has an attitude of aiming towards some goal. This attitude is plausibly a desire, or desire-like at least. For discussion see S. Keller, 'Welfare and the Achievement of Goals', *Philosophical Studies* 121 (2004), pp. 27–41.

<sup>25</sup> Sobel, 'Subjectivism and Idealization', p. 337.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of the Scope Problem see, for example, S. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 29–31; Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 17; B. Hooker, 'Mark

whilst accommodating what people have found attractive in Railton's intuition, namely that a conception of well-being that was completely independent of their pro-attitudes would be implausible. In light of this, my enumerative theory is able to capture much of what is attractive about desire-fulfilment theories whilst avoiding the scope problem that afflicts those theories. This is because my theory is attitude-sensitive without giving attitudes a role over and above being necessary constituents of the states that are good for us.<sup>27</sup> Going back to the two types of attitude-independence I distinguished earlier, we should notice that the fact that my enumerative theory is attitude-dependent in the sense captured by AD2 enables it to capture what we find compelling in Railton's intuition.

I am not claiming that this feature of my view – its attitude-sensitivity – secures an outright success for enumerative theories. Nor do I deny that such theories face other challenges. But it is enough to show that my enumerative theory captures a *major* attraction of desire-fulfilment theories – attitude-sensitivity – and without incurring the significant costs that desire-fulfilment theories generate.

## V. TESTING THE THEORY

How can we determine whether the enumerative theory I have suggested is generally adequate? There are two standard objections. One concerns the details of the theory, namely whether it has all and only the right things on the list. Another is whether the theory is arbitrary in some troubling way. I start with the second objection.

Someone might wonder how it is that we can determine what is on the list and how we can do so without inviting the charge that the theory is arbitrary. Though there is something to this objection, it is a mistake to think that it is damaging for the enumerative theory that I have proposed in particular. As it is sometimes wielded, the objection is overblown because no theory of well-being could avoid it.<sup>28</sup>

Overvold's Contribution to Philosophy', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 16 (1990–1), pp. 333–44; M. Overvold, 'Self-Interest and the Concepts of Self-Sacrifice', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1980), pp. 105–18; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 494; D. Portmore, 'Desire-fulfilment and Posthumous Harm', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2007), pp. 27–38; and D. Sobel, 'Well-being as the Object of Moral Consideration', *Economics and Philosophy* 14 (1998), pp. 249–81, at 268.

<sup>27</sup> The idea for this kind of view came in part from reflecting upon David Sobel's suggestion that 'the most sensible path for the objectivist about well-being is to embrace a pluralist account of what makes a person's life go better or worse in which the agent's attitudes are sometimes relevant to her good but sometimes are not' (D. Sobel, 'On the Subjectivity of Welfare', *Ethics* 107 (1997), pp. 501–8, at 503).

<sup>28</sup> It is also true that all philosophical theories are vulnerable to the worry that their base claims lack further justification.

If we ask the hedonist *why* pleasure (and only pleasure) is good for someone (and why pain and only pain is bad for someone) it is not clear what non-trivial explanation they could give for this. Similarly, if we ask the desire-fulfilment theorist *why* something is good for us if and only if, and because, we desire it, it's not clear what non-trivial explanation they could give of this fact. The same is true for human nature perfectionism and every other theory of well-being. Whilst more explanatory depth is better, other things being equal, all explanation stops somewhere.<sup>29</sup> For that reason one cannot say that in the absence of a further justification for the things on the list then the theory is troublingly arbitrary, for a similar objection could be mounted against all of the other theories. The truth in the arbitrariness objection is that it is a *difficult* task to discover what should be on the list. But there are at least things that we can do to test and if necessary improve the list.<sup>30</sup> This takes me to the first objection.

Moving on to the issue of the specific content of the list, clearly there are two kinds of counterexamples that we must rule out. We must test for absences and we must see if the list includes anything that should not be there. To test for the first, we follow a method like that used in discussing Crisp's anhedonic achiever.<sup>31</sup> We should imagine two people with identical bundles of identical goods and then imagine some addition of some purported extra basic well-being contributor or detractor. If we find it plausible to think that their well-being is thereby made unequal, this is evidence that we should expand the list to include this item.

To test for the second kind of mistake we should take bundles of the goods on the list and imagine two people with identical bundles except for the presence of, or extra, (e.g.) friendship. If in such cases we think that the two people have identical levels of well-being, we have some evidence that we should take that good off the list.

Of course, these tests will only generate defeasible evidence that some putative good does or does not belong on the list. Thankfully, there are other resources that we can bring in. First, one can try to show how this apparent good is in fact catered for by something else on the list. For example, one could argue that knowledge *as such* does not belong separately on the list of well-being contributors, for doing so would be

<sup>29</sup> Notice that the extra explanatory depth of the desire-fulfilment theory comes at the cost of its giving plausible answers (because it produces the scope problem).

<sup>30</sup> An alternative route would be to investigate the nature of prudential value, or something's being good for someone, as certain answers to this might tell us, or constrain, which things are first-order contributors to well-being. For discussion, see G. Fletcher, 'The Locative Analysis of Good for Formulated and Defended', *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy (JESP)* 6 (2012).

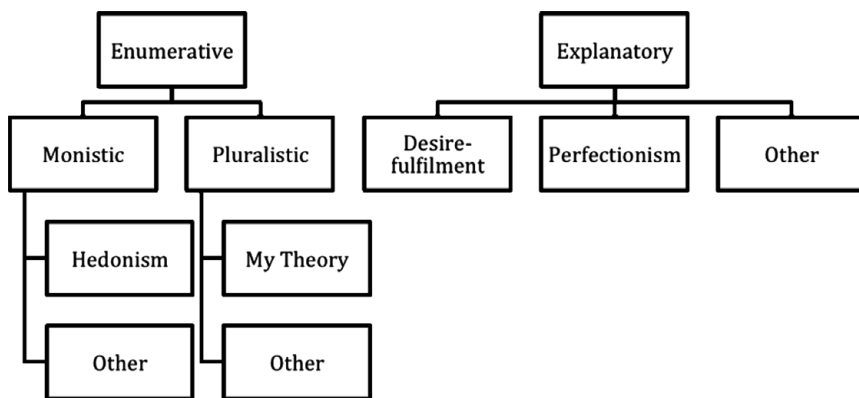
<sup>31</sup> Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, p. 122.

double-counting because the cases where it looks plausible to think that knowledge is good for someone are, in fact, cases where achievement in their (epistemic) goals or the exercise of their (epistemic) virtue is good for them. Second, we can try to explain our propensity to make such judgements of inequality in some other way, such as by being distracted by instrumental value or something else.<sup>32</sup> So although the tests mentioned above will not conclusively establish that something belongs on the list it is a useful way of determining of some putative good whether we should investigate it further.

Because of constraints of space, I have not here performed these tests for other putative goods such as autonomy, aesthetic appreciation, love, freedom, etc. But I have suggested how to do so. More importantly, I hope to have shown that doing so would be in the service of a theory that is more plausible than is often thought. For the enumerative theory, at least as formulated here, can accommodate the idea that a conception of well-being that could fail in any way to engage the agent would be implausibly alienating. And it is no more vulnerable to the charge of arbitrariness than other theories of well-being.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Herein, I argued for the following taxonomy of theories of well-being:



I showed that this taxonomy divides up theories of well-being along the most important dimensions and that for this reason, among others, it is better than the traditional taxonomy. I then supplied an enumerative theory of well-being that claims that the things that enhance well-being are Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect and Virtue. I then showed how this theory more satisfactorily respects

<sup>32</sup> An instance of this kind of strategy is found in Crisp, *Reasons and the Good*, p. 122.



the alienation intuition that has generally motivated desire-fulfilment theories. This enumerative theory requires further work. There are also many structural questions on which it is currently agnostic. But I hope to have shown that developing enumerative theories is worthwhile and that at least one instance deserves further development, since it is not subject to the problems most commonly alleged for enumerative theories.<sup>33</sup>

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